{ See Note at end. }

UNITY

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FOR

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THE COURAGE OF OUR IDEAS.

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HEBREWS, XI, 27: "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible."

"What I admire in Christopher Columbus," said Turgot, the great finance minister of Louis XVI., of France, "is not that he discovered the new world but that he went to look for it on the faith of an idea."

An idea which has reason at its base, or disinterested love, is the thing that is to be. The owner of a great idea is a seer of the future. His courage in living up to his convictions of that future is a token of the extent to which he penetrates the eternal laws and shares God's thought and God's love.

To the omniscient God the future is the present. The evolution of physical nature, the workings of human free will; such as these are the forces which, to our ordinary mortal minds, seem contingent, or containing the element of chance. They may come out one way or another.

But to God—the controlling power of the universe, the one who contains the many—the chance element is only the free play of the wheels of the machinery upon their axles; the result has no contingency. He sees it perhaps somewhat as the astronomers tell us that, if our eyes were only sharp enough, we might see the past: for example, see what was happening twenty-four thousand years ago upon a star of the sixteenth magnitude; because the spark of light which has just arrived from that luminary has taken so many years for its journey to us.

The idea, the thing seen by the spiritual imagination is so much of God's knowledge as can be laid hold of by a finite man. How much we might see who can tell? How much we do see depends upon what we are. In proportion to the greatness of the man, to the extent with which he has what we call character, that is breadth of intelligence, dignity of purpose, sensibility to fine influences; is he capable of receiving the divine aspect of things, of getting upon the eternal as contrasted with the mere time side of the world and of life, and not only receiving them but trying to put them to positive use and make them realities which every ordinary mind can see.

Some people of ideas there are who are dreamers, mere theorists whose souls have windows open to God's view of things, but whom the vision never moves to ac-

tion. They receive but they are not fruitful producers. But there are other people, more admirable, to whom an impression of what might be and ought to be—of what God means *should* be—is a summons to work. It straightway carries them away captive; it becomes their soul, they must put it into form and life now. The revelation to them is a mandate that they be prophets, apostles and martyrs to make the revelation known to men.

The ancients represented the leaders of men—law-givers, artists, poets—as having the privilege of talking with the gods. So Moses was said to have spoken to Jehovah face to face, as a man talketh with a friend. Such legends are certainly not literally true. There are no flesh and blood gods. But the Infinite Spirit takes the human spirit which is docile and wise up high above commonplace facts, above the truths which everybody knows, into mountain tops whence man as he is to be, and the world of the by and by appear.

So Moses brought down the decalogue from the Sinai of his thoughtful, sagacious, sympathetic soul, and it straightway began to revolutionize the character of Israel, and its revolutionary work is far from done. So Jesus went up into a mountain and discoursed to the people below of what he beheld afar of a new kingdom of God among men; and we are still striving with more or less heartiness, with considerable success indeed, to embody his visions of the future in practical legislation, and every day conduct.

For the man possessed of an idea which has bearings upon the material progress of men, which he eventually develops into the discovery of a continent or the construction of a labor-saving machine, people of all sorts and conditions have profound respect; at least after the man is dead and the world is enjoying the wealth which he produced. Columbus, De Soto, Raleigh, Watt, Morse, Howe, Bessemer and their like, are now spoken of reverently. They thought to some purpose; seldom indeed for their own temporal advantage, for most of them died poor; but the good things of this world are cheaper for us their survivors.

Some cynics tell us that it is only this class of ideas, producing tangible wealth, which obtains much respect among men. But this is a misjudgment. More slowly come the approval and reverence; but the kings of the world enthroned sooner or later in our hearts are those people who have had deep, earnest, unselfish convictions of what was good and true, which very few people of their day cared to share with them, but to which they gave their unstinted devotion, and their ideas have become or are becoming blessed facts.

We see the truth of this statement in some cases of modern philanthropy and reform. John Howard, spending twenty years and a fortune to persuade modern Christendom that decent humanity in prison discipline was a more certain corrective of crime than the barbarous punishments everywhere prevalent, made as his dying request, "Give me no monument; lay me quietly in the earth and let me be forgotten!" And the answer of intelligent after generations is uttered in Jeremy Bentham's eulogy of Howard: "In the scale of moral descent the labors of the legislator and the writer are as far below his as earth is below heaven. His kingdom was of a better world. He died a martyr after having lived an apostle,"

William Wilberforce, devoting his gifts of wealth, culture, social influence, moral earnestness and religious faith to an unremitting crusade in the British Parliament against the African slave trade, not only lived to see an immense revolution in English public opinion upon the iniquity of that infamous traffic, but, three days before his death, after forty-three years of varied appeal with voice and pen to the enlightened conscience of his countrymen, received the glad tidings that the House of Commons had voted to abolish the last vestige of African slavery under the British flag by appropriating twenty millions of pounds for the compensation of the West India planters.

Two men of Boston, of unlike advantages of education and social standing, alike only in their confidence that God's laws and man's sense of justice were with their cause—Garrison, a poor printer, and

Phillips, a rich son of an old New England family and a rising lawyer—led their forlorn hope of abolitionism for thirty years against the intrenchments of negro slavery in organic law, in control of political parties, and in the timidity of commercial interests. We are too near these men and the passions and fanaticisms which centred around them to judge their virtues and defects without prejudice. The fact abides that substantially the entire nation stands now at their point of view that in a free government every man, of whatever color, must be a free man.

The elder Socinus, the father of Protestant Unitarianism, declared at the beginning of the Reformation—and his declaration was everywhere in Christendom received as an assault upon morals and religion—that persecution for theological opinion was a crime. If Christendom to-day is not unanimous in approving his declaration, its members seldom have the courage to openly confess that they are so far behind their age. The rights of the Jews in Christian nations, the rights of Catholics in Protestant lands, the duty of the state to protect factory operatives, especially children, against the greed of employers—such as these are among the victories won within the lifetime of many of you by the faith of a few unpopular pioneers in the region of politics, religion, and common morality and humanity.

Such victories are gained because they are fought for the higher nature of man against the lower nature. Their inspiration lies in the assurance of their advocates that they are in league with the Eternal.

And whether the special battle be lost or won, whether the man possessed of faith in an idea compels the world to give him a hearing or dies crushed and despairing, his essential purpose is not lost; for his heroic simplicity will call the attention of other men to his cause, and the battle will be again begun in a new form, as has the contest in behalf of every principle of human good been begun, again and again, until men would enlist in its advocacy.

The force of these illustrations lies in the fact that they point out a duty and an encouragement for the common man.

The people who stand conspicuous in history have your and my moral nature, and essentially your and my power to stamp the convictions of that moral sense upon their generation. They act at special times, but they act through the average conscience and will.

The world's advance is the result of the determination of the mass of men, and not of the simple lift of a few giants.

Public moral and religious sentiment is the response of the already half-awakened faith of the mass of human hearts of each generation to the appeal of some sagacious leader, who creates their enthusiasm for virtue, but does not create their virtue, but who finds it in quiet street and lane, in workshop, and in field, waiting to be shown what it ought to do, and who speaks to it and for it.

So Christianity was born because there were religious people waiting for it, not quite sure in what special form their salvation was to come, but sure it would summon them to great living; so the Republic was born, because the mass of people then living here were ready for self government; so the modern agitation against drunkenness was born; so the revolutions which are to root out of politics the spoils system and the bribery system are to be born, because there has been and still is a strong latent sense of the rights and duties of manhood in a great multitude of individual hearts.

I. A duty taught us by the great leaders of history is that we believe in and reverence our great convictions as the voice of God to our individual souls.

A remarkable change has taken place within a few generations in the estimate put by the best thought of the world upon the intrinsic character and worth of the individual man. Once the common man was a base creature. Religion called him a worm, naturally incapable of any thought or purpose which could raise him above his animal life. Statesmen dealt with him as a born drudge, or as food for powder. And though it was again and again shown by illustrious example that some of the most exalted inspirations in art, in literature, in patriotism, and in religion had come from he ranks of common men; though the re-

generator of Christendom was the son of a laborer and of no social standing, still the old theories stubbornly held their own, and the multitudes were taught by word and brutal deed that if any salvation was to come to the world it must be sought in some miraculous endowment of some member of an elect class.

The new doctrine taught by science, rational religion and intelligent statesmanship is of the essential dignity and improvability of natural man.

Jesus gave to the world a new watchword when he said "Ye are Sons of God! Slave and King, priest and worshiper, Jew and Gentile, ye are alike partakers of the same divine nature, heirs of the same immortal heritage."

In vindicating the justice of this sentiment, so old yet not taking living form until of late, we who receive its new inspiration must take a conspicuous part: whether the theory be a true or a false one depends upon the sort of manhood which springs up under it.

Are you to be trusted with education and political power? That depends not merely whether or not your enlarged intelligence is a tool to make you more adept in villainy and your privilege in politics is used to rob some other man of his rights, but whether or not the sum total of public virtue and contentment is *increased* by what you are.

Are you capable of helping produce a religion which shall be freer from groveling motives or perverted conceptions of truth than any which have gone before it? That depends upon how much insight of the great laws of the world your own mind has obtained; whether what you think of God, man and heaven is a personal experience or only a hearsay; how near you have tried to get to the real God by the simplicity and unselfishness of your thinking and living. The great beneficial institutions of the world have been born in the faith of people who were not distinguished by rank or opportunity. They were born because the man heard Sovereign Truth speak to him in person.

To you also, thoughtful man or woman, comes Sovereign Truth with some divine message. Perhaps you think you are only an atom in the great human ocean, insignificant and without influence. The great Amazons and Mississippis are impregnated with the color and flavor of all the rain drops which have swollen their head waters. And if the trickling rivulet high up in the hill countries is pungent with some special mineral like salt, it flavors even the mighty ocean. No man of character is the repetition of any other man. A positive thought, the careful turning over in your mind of something which pertains to the general good; your discovery of some striking fact or principle is inevitably an addition to the world's knowledge, trival, it may be, yet possibly, despite its triviality, because it meets some other mind in the exact condition for being impressed by it, the beginning of a new era in history.

We often hear it remarked of some truth, like the golden rule for example, that it is an old discovery.

But when such a truth speaks to the generation that is in the mood for paying attention to it, as the Sermon on the Mount chanced to speak, it attains the power of an entirely new discovery. It is the groups of two or three men or women putting their heads together, and the heads which are by chance empty being filled with an idea born in the other's busy brain, which makes slander, which raises a mob, which deposes the minister of a church.

It is the honest sentiment of a vigorous-minded man ashamed of the baseness which is around him, ashamed of the lack of generous public spirit, who says his word so that somebody heeds it, and it becomes the first impulse of a community's improved manners and regenerated public life.

And when the sentiment is born of no momentary caprice, but is as most of our nobler convictions are, of long patient brooding and inner debate, then the force with which it falls upon the world is as superior to that of common transient words as the existence of a man who thinks seriously and deeply is an exceptional fact among the throng of people whose average opinions are but parrot phrases learned by rote.

The serious-minded, thinking man is a creator of public opinion, of public virtue, and of the general faith in whatever is high and holy; and he creates because he feels an eternal law laid upon him to think as he does. Thus he recognizes the voice of God within his soul.

II. Another duty imposed upon us by what we witness of the influence of great convictions, is that we hold fast to the faith that the best ideas are to be the conquering ideas.

The Christianity which we endeavor to teach in the Unitarian Church is *optimism;* the doctrine that good is destined to be the victorious force in the universe, be the time taken for the conquest long or short. That, as I read it, was the Christianity of Jesus and of Paul, and that has been the faith of all the people who have brought to pass much that is beneficent to the human race.

A marked feature of the temperament of the Christians of the first three centuries, when the old empires were falling to pieces about them, and even the earth itself seemed to show signs of decrepitude in frequent earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, droughts and famines; was their cheerful confidence that God would take care of all that was worth preserving. This spirit is indicated in the epitaphs of their tombstones, and is borne witness to by hostile critics who knew their daily lives. It is true that beneath this optimism was a great deal of mistaken expectation as to the manner in which God would save the good things; yet, in the main their faith was vindicated. A new and improved order of the ages rose upon the ruin of ancient things; and the resurrection was due as much as to anybody, to these people who kept their equanimity while others were in a panic. There is a modern parallel, upon a less dignified scale in the story of that member of the General Court of Connecticut who, when the dark day of 1780 fell upon the session of that body, calmed the terror of his associates by moving that candles be brought in, and that the legislative business be continued, since there could be no better service of God, if the world's end was at hand, than to be found doing their duty.

Faith in the final prevalence of the best is faith that a good God rules, and not an evil one. It is confidence in the predominate healthiness of nature over all tendencies to disease and decay.

And the fact of our having such faith is a corrective of much that would otherwise be ill. But it must spring from conviction, and be always ready to develop into action if it is to be of any genuine worth.

In the experiences of life, men of generous sentiments and hopes meet with grave discouragements. How many times have there been in American history when it seemed as if the most reactionary and vicious elements of society had come to permanent power! There was a long, long stretch in our affairs in the days before the war, when officials of every degree appeared to exult in defying and overriding the first principles of justice, when free, honest speech and free, honest printing were subject to constant violation. Many men despaired of the republic. A faithful few kept heart and steered right on in their duty, and the revulsion to better things eventually followed their faith. Such trials come up in our smaller communities. We wonder at times if anybody has any firm moral principle; if we can find enough disinterested and devoted people to keep alive churches, charities, the various institutions which represent belief in spiritual forces. Where are the men and women, we ask, who are the exponents and examples of inflexible private integrity and unselfish patriotic service? The favorable answer to that misgiving, if such answer comes as it generally does in due season, depends upon the determination in those who make the complaint to hold fast by their own high principles, and be sure that they are not remiss of duty; for, standing unshaken, they become a rallying point in the day when the community gets disgusted with folly and selfishness.

Do you know of any church which has kept its troth through many dark days when its numbers were failing through death or removal, or through the defection of the lukewarm who follow the ebb and flow of material prosperity, but which

at last emerged into a brighter day of success?

If you do know of such an one you will tell me that its salvation lay in a few men and women to whom their religious convictions seemed so much a part of the invincible truth of God that they would as soon thought of running away from destiny, from Providence himself, as to doubt that their time of strength was not far away.

There are great moral and spiritual convictions, superior to the creeds of our church, or the platform of our party, or the material prosperity of our land, which sometimes fall under a heavy cloud; are unpopular or in scorn, and to hold them is to be called a visionary, a fanatic, a renegade. Then he is the devout man, he the patriot, he the courageous loyalist to church or party, who fixes his eye on the future when passion will be silent and conscience be heard, and stands fast by the ideas which seem to him to be the right; sure that though he be alone to-day, to-morrow he will be in the majority.

III. A third very important feature of the courage of our ideas, is that we miss no fair opportunity of showing our honest thought, our great saving truth.

There is a faith which is of bigotry, which holds its convictions because it has never candidly inquired if there be any other better ones. There is a more creditable faith which looks upon all convictions as attempts to throw light upon the search of humanity for truth and goodness.

This alone is the faith which a large-minded man can have, and just in proportion as he loves men and trusts in truth as God's revelation, will he feel it a duty and a joy to declare to the world what he thinks in the proper time and place.

And this duty is always the more necessary because the doctrines of which men hear the most are not those which throw the freshest light of honest inquiry upon their doubts and difficulties, but those which by chance, for good or bad reasons, happen to be in power.

There is, somewhere, a story of an ugly old idol which had stood for centuries in the public square of an oriental city, its priests fattening upon the hard-earned gifts of its votaries by persuading them that the safety of their city, the immunity of their homes from pestilences, and their hopes of Heaven depended upon its receiving regular homage. An invading army of a hostile religion captured the city, and in their destroying fury the soldiers clambered upon the idol's pedestal to demolish it with axe and hammer. A shriek of dismay rose from the worshippers as the blows fell upon their venerated image; but presently, as the expected judgment bolts failed to appear, their dread was turned to contempt, some even joined in the destruction, while the rest went their way, with the sense of having shaken off a devouring monster, but not without disgust that they had spent so much precious substance upon a make-believe God.

The legend tells the story of a great deal that is established, not only in religion, but in politics and in social life, whose unworthiness has never been put to test.

Nor is there any practicable way of ridding the world of wicked opinions save by the advent of some sincere, frank soul who is ready to say: "This is what I believe; you think otherwise; here is the truth as revealed to me. Let us try conclusions, and God defend the right!"

You believe in a religion, let us say; a religion of hope, of comfort, of sweet reasonableness. Your neighbor, as you think, believes in a theology of despair. You are also assured that in the long run men will repudiate every theology which appeals to their fears or denies the trustworthiness of their natural reason. But what if such as you are timid and dumb, making no proclamation of your superior religion, hiding from the world the message it wants to hear and which will be its salvation? What religion will men have in that day when the old foundations are utterly broken up? None so far as you care!

Then you are guilty of treason towards the rights of men and of faithlessness to the revelation of God.

Such guilt, in greater or less measure, has every man who falters and hesitates

and equivocates and compromises when the world needs the truth, when the country wants righteousness more than partisanship, and the church wants honesty more than harmony, and society wants to be told of its diseases rather than to be kept content with a fair and seemly outside.

"Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes, they were souls that stood alone,
While the men they agonized for hurled the contumelious stone;
Stood serene and down the future saw the golden beams incline
To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith sublime,
By one man's plain truth to manhood, and to God's supreme design."

Do we seem to plead for fanaticism, for proselytism in season and out, for making ourselves disagreeable and our neighbors uncomfortable? Nay, not so! Our plea is that in a world in such constant need of straightforward simplicity, of upright and downright honesty, of reverence for the things which are eternal as opposed to the things which are merely provisional, we, at least, keep our standard high, let our example shine out far and clear, and do that work which conscience tells us we ought to do in the interest of whatsoever is pure and helpful and manly and holy.

Our "Church-Door Pulpit" hints its purpose in its name. It aims to furnish fortnightly a transfigured tract,—transfigured by being paid for, and by representing not so much a given system of beliefs as the emphasis, in somewhat varying beliefs, on "Freedom, Fellowship and Character in Religion;" this tract to be taken from the rack or table at the church-door to the home, there to serve its little mission by reading in the family, lending to a neighbor, mailing to a distant friend, etc. We hope the plan may be destined to wide adoption by Liberal churches as part of their regular church-work.

The word "UNITY" in the title bears to the Committee who arrange the series a wide meaning, pointing more to the substance, than to the forms, of religious thought and faith; and in inviting contributions they have sought, not only through the whole range, but in both directions beyond the range, of those who bear the "Unitarian" name,—though most of the writers must naturally be found within that name. "New Orthodoxy," "New Judaism," those who care for no name but "Religion," and the "Ethical Societies," will all be represented. The choice of subject is left to the writers; and *each writer is responsible for his own utterance alone, and for nothing else in the series.* "One of your best—a life-helping sermon, or a thought-sermon reaching the life," was the invitation sent out.

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